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Contact: Cindy Wood (202)208-4989

Secretary Norton Designates the Merchants' Exchange Building In Philadelphia as a National Historic Landmark

WASHINGTON-- Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton today announced the designation of the Merchants' Exchange Building in Philadelphia, Penn., as National Historic Landmark (NHL). This site is one of 15 recommended to the Secretary by the National Park System Advisory Board for their national significance in American history and culture.

The 15 new NHLs also include the Sheldon Jackson School, Sitka, Alaska; Fresno Sanitary Landfill, Fresno, Calif.; Samuel Wadsworth Russell House, Middletown, Conn.; Nicholas Jarrot Mansion, Cahokia, Ill.; S.R. Crown Hall, Chicago, Ill.; J.C. Lore Oyster House, Solomons, Md.; Gibson House, Boston, Mass.; Dutch Reformed Church, Newburgh, N.Y.; *Modesty*, West Sayville, N.Y.; Rudolph Oyster House, West Sayville, N.Y.; Bethania Historic District, Bethania, N.C.; Randolph Field Historic District, Bexar County, Texas; New Kent School and George W. Watkins School, New Kent County, Va.; and the John Philip Sousa Jr. High School, Washington, D.C.

"These special sites underscore our heritage and tell stories of periods and events in our history," Norton said. "By preserving these unique sites, we share our culture and rich diversity with our children for future generations to learn from and enjoy."

NHLs are identified by theme and special studies prepared or overseen by National Park Service (NPS) historians and archaeologists. The NPS often conducts NHL studies in partnership with federal, state, tribal or local preservation officials; the academic community; independent scholars; and others knowledgeable about a particular subject. The Merchants' Exchange Building was nominated for embodying distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type exceptionally valuable for a study of the period, style or method of construction.

"National Historic Landmarks guide us in comprehending important trends and patterns in American history," said Mainella. "The Merchants' Exchange Building possesses those exceptional qualities that help us as a Nation illuminate and understand our complex national heritage."

The Philadelphia Merchants' Exchange Building is nationally significant due to its architectural design. It is also important to nineteenth century Philadelphia as it served as a commercial and financial center for the city. Until the Civil War, the building served its original purpose as a center for commerce as well as a home for the United States Post Office. This monumental office building was designed by William Strickland (1788-1854) in 1831, and is an exquisite expression of the Greek Revival style.

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Strickland was considered one of the leading architects of his day and has for many years been recognized as one of the most highly respected architects in the United States. The Merchants' Exchange Building is believed by many to be William Strickland's most successful and innovative design and is a culmination of Greek Revival elements during the height of the style's popularity. It was Strickland's last major project in Philadelphia and it is believed to be his masterpiece. In the Merchants' Exchange Building, Strickland would demonstrate his growth and evolution as an architect as he progressed from copying the Parthenon in the Second Bank to a more creative, elaborate, and expressive design.

Landmarks are recognized by the Secretary of the Interior as nationally significant properties of exceptional value in representing or illustrating an important theme in the history of the Nation. These nationally significant properties help us understand the history of the Nation and illustrate the nationwide impact of events or persons associated with the property, its architectural type or style, or information potential.

All NHLs are included in the National Register of Historic Places, which is the nation's official list of the cultural resources and historic properties worthy of preservation. Landmarks constitute 2,341, or roughly 3 percent of approximately 73,000 sites listed in the National Register; the others are of state and local significance.

Most NHLs are owned by private individuals or groups. Others are owned by local, state, tribal, or federal government agencies, or may have mixed public-private ownership. Owners of NHLs are free to manage their property as they choose, provided no federal license, permit, or funding is involved. The owner agrees to observe simple preservation precepts with respect to the property and receives technical advice and assistance from preservation experts if needed.

Landmark designation offers advantages to owners who wish to preserve their properties. A bronze plaque bearing the name of the NHL and attesting to its national significance is presented to the owner upon request. NHL owners may be able to obtain federal historic preservation funding, when funds are available, and federal investment tax credits for rehabilitation as well as other provisions may apply.

The historic importance of potential landmarks is evaluated by the NPS and by the National Park System Advisory Board during meetings held twice a year that are open to the public. The Advisory Board includes citizens who are national and community leaders in the conservation of natural, historic, and cultural areas. Recommendations by the Advisory Board are made to the Secretary of the Interior on potential NHLs. Final decisions regarding NHL designations are made by the Secretary. Additional information on the National Historic Landmark program can be found on the NPS website at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/landmarks.htm> or by contacting Carol Shull at (202)343-9504 or John Sprinkle at (202) 343-8166.

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